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Central Intelligence Agency


Washington, D.C. 20505

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

13 December 1985

Iran: Khomeini's Role in Decisionmaking

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Summary

Ayatollah Khomeini played a key role in several major political decisions during the latter half of 1985, leaving no doubt he is still Iran's preeminent political figure.

however, giving his chief subordinates considerable independence to decide some issues. There are about 15 other key players in the highly factionalized Iranian political scene who have a significant impact on Iranian policy.

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In most of Khomeini's public appearances during the last few months, he apparently functioned reasonably well for a person his age. He has also appeared mentally alert and fit in private audiences, such as appearances before the diplomatic corps.

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This paper was prepared at the request of the Director of the Decision Support Staff, NSC Crisis Management Center, by the Persian Gulf Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, NESA,

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Several reports indicate Khomeini played a strong role in the presidential election this August and in the selection of a new cabinet.

- He passed the word this summer to potential radical candidates for president to bow out of the race, thereby assuring the reelection of his preferred choice, the relatively moderate incumbent, Ali Khamenei.
- When Khamenei's attempt to replace his radical rival, Prime Minister Musavi, produced a stalemate between the two powerful politicians, Khomeini publicly reaffirmed his support for Musavi, guaranteeing his reelection.

Both these instances demonstrated that Khomeini continues his practice of balancing one faction against another, a tactic that aided his rise to power and has helped him remain the ultimate arbiter of Iranian politics. [REDACTED]

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We believe Khomeini also directed the process that resulted in the Council of Experts' official selection of Ayatollah Montazeri in November as Khomeini's successor, although we have no specific information about this process. Khomeini's deputies on the Council would not have proceeded on such an important matter without his approval unless he were already incapacitated, and Khomeini has since made two public addresses. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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Khomeini's condition almost certainly has allowed his subordinates greater leeway to make decisions than would be the case if he enjoyed perfect health. He delegated some executive duties to Montazeri several years ago, and he probably has delegated responsibility for many routine matters and even some relatively important issues to other subordinates. We lack enough information on the daily functioning of his office to permit a judgment about the exact range of such delegated powers. [REDACTED]

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Annex: Principal Players

Key decisionmakers other than Khomeini include about a dozen governmental leaders and a few senior clerics. Their power derives more from their relationships with Khomeini and his colleagues than from their institutional positions. []

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The Iranian leadership is split by ideological, personal, and generational differences. One major faction, the radicals, favors greater government control of the economy, aggressive export of the revolution--including use of terrorism--and continuation of the war. Another main faction, a moderate/conservative coalition, seeks to limit governmental involvement in economic matters, generally opposes violent export of the revolution, and favors a negotiated end to the war. Some of the most important Iranian leaders--such as Montazeri and Consultative Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani--are pragmatists who support the conservatives on some issues and the radicals on others. Khomeini himself has increasingly tended to fit this description and to support a middle course--except on the war, which he insists must continue until Iraqi President Saddam Husayn falls. []

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Pragmatists

Ayatollah Montazeri, a senior cleric in his sixties who has increasingly taken on important duties delegated by Khomeini. Labeled a radical in the early years of the regime, he has become a leading spokesman for more moderate policies and may be arguing for an end to the war. He has strongly criticized the USSR and the US but also has suggested publicly that renewed relations with the US are possible. []

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Assembly Speaker **Rafsanjani**, a mid-level cleric in his fifties who has emerged as a skilled politician and is now second only to Khomeini in power. A firm believer in tight clerical control, Rafsanjani is an ally of Montazeri, probably because he believes he can control Montazeri after Khomeini's death. He is probably more willing than Montazeri to deal with the Soviets. []

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President **Khamenei**, a mid-level cleric in his forties who is less politically adept than Rafsanjani but is known as an excellent speaker. He opposes Montazeri but was re-elected earlier this year with Khomeini's backing. []

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Ayatollah Meshkini, a senior cleric in his fifties or sixties who shares with Montazeri responsibility delegated by Khomeini over the Revolutionary Guard, the judiciary, and the clerical community. He is anti-Soviet, a hawk on the war, and a strong supporter of tight clerical political control. He may be a rival to Montazeri. []

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Chief of the Joint Staff **Sohrabi**, an Army officer in his fifties--possibly a protege of the former chief who was linked to the moderate-conservative coalition. A military professional by inclination rather than a politician, he probably is, nevertheless, drawn into political maneuvering because of this position. []

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Radicals

Revolutionary Guard Commander **Rezai** and Guard Minister **Rafiq-Dust**, laymen in their thirties who have longstanding ties to influential clerics, radical Arab states, and Muslim dissident groups. Recent cutbacks in the Guard's role in law enforcement and internal security may have been aimed in part at reducing their ability to influence the power struggle. One or both may be allies of Rafsanjani. []

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Heavy Industries Minister **Nabavi**, a layman in his forties who has been repeatedly labelled a leftist and who is an excellent manager, according to Rafsanjani. He has ties to a paramilitary group whos sympathizers hold other influential positions. []

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Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs **Sheikh-ol-Eslam**, a Berkeley-educated layman in his thirties who was a leader of the takeover of the US Embassy and has placed his hostage-taker proteges in the Foreign Ministry. He is a strong advocate of radical foreign policy positions and has been closely linked to terrorist activities. []

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Ground Forces Commander **Seyed-Shirazi**, an Army officer in his forties who made his reputation fighting Kurdish dissidents in northwestern Iran and purging the Army. He has been a hawk on the war. He may have ties to Montazeri. []

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Moderates/Conservatives

The aged "Grand" Ayatollahs--**Shariat-Madari**, **Golpayegani**, **Marashi-Najafi**, **Qomi**--have great religious stature but are philosophically opposed to playing a sustained or leading role in any power struggle. Their influence is felt indirectly through their former students, some of whom hold important posts, and through their supporters in the bazaar. []

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Ayatollah **Mahdavi-Kani**, a senior cleric in his fifties who leads an important clerical group based in Tehran and has held several important government posts. He has strong ties to the regime's paramilitary forces. Mohadavi-Kani has been repeatedly identified as an advocate of moderate policies who wants less clerical involvement in daily government. []

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Ayatollah **Musavi-Ardebili**, a senior cleric in his fifties who heads the judicial wing of the government. In the past he advocated moderate domestic policies behind the scenes but during the last two years has adopted a much more public role. [REDACTED]

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Foreign Minister **Velayati**, a layman in his forties, who is typical of the talented technocrats working to create a less radical regime. He has repeatedly been mentioned as a leading candidate to become prime minister. [REDACTED]

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